

# Case Study

## South Downs NHS Health Trust

### Working without a retirement age

South Downs NHS Health Trust provides services to people living mainly in Brighton and Hove. It currently employs 2,061 staff ranging in age from 16 to 74.

The organisation is committed to promoting equality and diversity and tackling age-related discrimination. It has introduced and promoted a range of options to attract and retain older workers, including the removal of the mandatory retirement age and the introduction of more flexible retirement options.

"Removing our retirement age and introducing flexible retirement options helps to meet the needs of older workers and improve recruitment and retention within the Trust."

**Kate Paxton, senior personnel manager**

### Retirement policy

Says Kate Paxton, senior personnel manager: 'We now have a situation in the UK labour market where a pool of people want or need to continue to work beyond 65 and are fully capable of doing so. Removing our retirement age and introducing flexible retirement options helps to meet the needs of older workers and improve recruitment and retention within the Trust.'

### Training and development

The Trust recognises the importance of training and development in motivating and retaining staff. Says Kate; 'We encourage staff development through lifelong learning programmes for people who may not have had opportunities in education when they were younger. This helps to develop learning and study skills as well as confidence.'

At least eight participants on the course were over 45 when they joined. One such candidate, who is now doing an Open University degree, said; 'I left school at 15 years with no qualifications - to do this course at 53 was just great. It has given me such a boost.'

The Trust has also had new managers' guidelines for student work experience placements in place since April 2004. To date at least three school students have benefited from participating in this scheme.

### **The business benefits for South Downs NHS Health Trust of a sound approach to age diversity:**

- Avoids losing skilled people through retirement

- Develops people into our hardest to recruit posts who may not otherwise have fulfilled their full potential, benefiting both the organisation and the individual
- Improves recruitment and retention rates (number of staff aged over 65 increased from 17 when the policy was introduced in 2003 to 26 in 2004)
- Encourages open discussion to ensure that issues are managed respectfully should they arise in the future
- Presents the Trust to the public as a positive employer to work for.